



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 150

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2004

No. 131

Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, we praise Your greatness, might, and majesty. You are all that is in Heaven and Earth. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted above all. Both riches and honor come from You and in Your hands is power. Your compassion never fails.

Bless our Senators as they strive to do Your will. Give them wisdom and courage for the living of these days. Bless the Members of this body who will be leaving us. May they find fulfillment in the knowledge that the full harvest of their labors is yet to come.

Unite us in the common endeavor of making America a beacon of freedom for our world. May all we say and do in the days to come truly honor You. We pray in Your powerful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The PRESIDENT pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I welcome everyone back for the final wrapup of the 108th Congress. I was just speaking with the Democratic leader, and we were remarking that we have a lot to do in a short period of time over the course of the week.

There is a lot going on in terms of orientation of new Senators who will not officially take office until January, but there are also leadership elections occurring today and tomorrow. I expect that in this brief session, which will bring the 108th Congress to a close, we will finish before Thanksgiving for sure. And as we sort out both the agenda and work that has been accomplished over the last several weeks, we will have a much better and clearer idea as to when we will finish this brief session.

I know everybody is anxious to get back to their families after this week or week and a half and to spend time with constituents and begin enjoying the eventual holidays and planning for the year ahead.

I look forward to working with the new Senators as they come onboard, and the leadership, as the leadership elections occur. I think we will all join with a renewed commitment to working together, working across the aisle, working with civility and respect for the traditions of the Senate. I think we will be able to build effectively on the accomplishments we have achieved to date in the 108th Congress.

Over the next several days, we have a lot of business, with three essential pieces of business that must be addressed. The nine remaining spending bills for fiscal year 2005 are currently being addressed in what is called an omnibus bill. It is a bipartisan bill. There has been huge progress over the last several weeks as staff and Senators have been working together on this very important bill.

Second, we have intelligence matters and an authorization bill for the Intelligence Committee that is currently being addressed, as well as legislation that is currently in conference that addresses the 9/11 Commission reform recommendations, an effort we began to aggressively address in late July once the 9/11 Commission Report was released, and immediately Senator

DASCHLE and I set a course that has been followed pretty much as we intended. That is, following hearings, we would discuss and write a bill in the Senate and pass that bill, and the House likewise.

Conferees were appointed several weeks ago, and the conferees have been working constantly to generate and produce a bill that I am very hopeful we will be able to bring to the floor later this week.

The third issue is the debt limit. Secretary Snow informs us that we have a short window of opportunity to get the debt limit accomplished. The Treasury Department estimates that Congress must take action by Thursday in order to prevent the Federal Government from defaulting on the debt. Discussions have been underway in the last several days and will be underway today as to how best we accomplish that.

We have some scheduling challenges that will occur over the course of this week, a little bit later in the week. It obviously is an issue we will be addressing. I am confident we will be able to take the necessary steps to avoid even any consideration of default.

In addition, there are a number of other issues that we will be addressing, such as nominations that we would like to settle in this 108th Congress. Those discussions are underway. We have the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA. The House and Senate conferees will be meeting on Wednesday to approve the negotiated language. So I expect we will be able to pass that bill by the end of the week and have it on the President's desk before we adjourn.

Briefly, with respect to the schedule today, we will be recessing at 12:30 p.m. in order for the Democratic policy luncheon to meet. This side of the aisle will be conducting our leadership elections in a policy meeting tomorrow.

Today, we will reconvene at 2:15 p.m. to begin consideration of the nomination of Francis Harvey to be Secretary

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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